

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1707

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 22051

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: ECON, EAIR, TH

SUBJ: MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS THAWIT KLINPRATHUM GETS HIS WINGS
CLIPPED

REF: A) BANGKOK 21483 B) BANGKOK 21994 C) BANGKOK 21995

SUMMARY: COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER THAWIT KLINPRATHUM HAS HAD HIS
AUTHORITY IN AVIATION MATTERS CURTAILED. PRESSURE IS MOUNTING
TO HAVE HIM REMOVED FROM THAT MINISTRY.

1. AS A RESULT OF THAI AIRWAYS CORP. (TAC) AND ITS SUBSIDIARY
THAI INTERNATIONAL'S AUGUST 3 STRIKE AGAINST THE RTG AND AIR
SIAM, COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER THAWIT KLINPRATHUM HAS HAD HIS
AUTHORITY IN AVIATION MATTERS VIRTUALLY WITHDRAWN. THAWIT AND
HIS UNDER SECRETARY, DR. KAN NAKHAMADI, WORKED OUT A FIVE-POINT
PLAN ANNOUNCED ON JULY 29 (REF A) WHICH WOULD HAVE HAD THE
EFFECT OF MERGING AIR SIAM AND THAI INTER, OR AT LEAST GIVING
THE MERGER A GOOD SHOVE. TAC AND THAI INTER OPPOSITION BROUGHT
ABOUT THE STRIKE, AND CONSEQUENT RTG REBUKE TO THAWIT.

2. THE CABINET DECIDED AT A MEETING AUGUST 3 THAT ANY FUTURE
DECISION CONCERNING AVIATION POLICY MADE BY THE MINISTRY OF
COMMUNICATIONS (MOC) MUST FIRST BE CLEARED WITH THE CABINET BEFORE
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IT CAN GO INTO EFFECT. THE CABINET HAS ALSO FORCED THAWIT TO

DROP HIS FIVE-POINT PLAN AND ATTEMPTED REORGANIZATION OF TAC'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

3. COMMENT: THAWIT IS THE SECRETARY GENERAL AND NUMBER TWO MAN IN THE SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY, ONE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S SHAKY FOUR-PARTY COALITION. THE GOVERNMENT WILL NOT, THEREFORE, TAKE ANY ACTION AGAINST THAWIT--ASIDE FROM SLAPPING HIS HAND ON THE AVIATION ISSUE--UNTIL AFTER THE CRUCIAL BUDGET BILL IS PASSED. THE BILL GOES TO THE HOUSE FOR DEBATE TODAY, AND ALL COALITION MEMBER PARTIES HAVE AGREED TO SUPPORT IT. ONCE THAT HURDLE IS OVERCOME, HOWEVER, THAWIT MAY BE IN SERIOUS TROUBLE. ON JULY 29 HE VOTED IN THE HOUSE AGAINST THE APPOINTMENT OF AN ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMITTEE, CONTRIBUTING TO THE FIRST MAJOR DEFEAT FOR THE GOVERNMENT, AND PARTICULARLY THE COALITION'S LARGEST PARTY, THE DEMOCRATS (REF C). THEN, WITHIN A WEEK, CAME THE TAC/THAI INTER STRIKE AIMED IN LARGE PART AGAINST HIM AND HIS POLICIES. SO THAWIT HAS MANAGED WITHIN THE SPACE OF A FEW DAYS THE NOT INCONSIDERABLE FEAT OF INFURIATING BOTH THE DEMOCRAT PARTY AND THE ROYAL THAI AIR FORCE (RTAF), WHICH DOMINATE TAC AND THAI INTER. PRESSURE TO REMOVE THAWIT FROM HIS MOC TOP SPOT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY INCREASE IN THE WAKE OF THESE CONTRETEMPTS. IF HE GOES, DR. KAN IS LIKELY TO FOLLOW SHORTLY THEREAFTER.

WHITEHOUSE

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